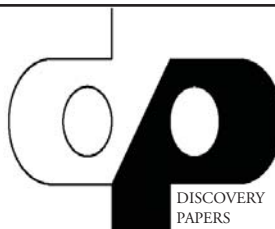




“I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE”



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John 6:35-51
15th Message
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Jesus would not have fared well in a class taught by Miss Manners. A life devoted to sacrificial love may be well and good but he seems to be deficient when it comes to social skills. Jesus regularly refuses the euphemisms and hesitations that help everyone save face. He isn't satisfied with slow progress or incremental change. He avoids small talk. And for these things we should thank God. We'll see in today's text (John 6:35-51) that Jesus draws an uncompromising contrast between belief and unbelief.

To review, an extraordinary miracle—feeding a multitude in the wilderness—had two results: 1) a crowd of Galileans with memories of Moses, manna, and the Exodus who wanted Jesus to meet their needs on their terms and 2) a discourse in which Jesus teaches using bread as a metaphor for spiritual realities.

John 6:35-40:

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. 36 But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Jesus took his bread-based instruction to a high point in announcing, “I am the bread of life.”

Two wonderful blessings flow from this announcement. First he says that “the one who comes to me and believes in me” will never miss out. He is promising to meet the needs of our present life in a profound way. Later in John he'll use the phrase, “life in abundance” (10:10) and I think that is what he is talking about here as well; we will never hunger and never thirst. What we long for will be supplied to us.

Using the terms hunger and thirst make the point that Jesus is dealing with what is essential, not matters of preference. Our bodies have requirements for survival (food and water). Our hearts have requirements as well. It is hunger and thirst of the heart that Jesus is speaking of.

We need to be loved with a love that is strong enough to cast out fear. Loved by One who goes beneath the surface; One who knows us truly and refuses to give up on us.

We hunger for lives that make a difference, to spend ourselves in noble pursuits, not in ‘striving after wind’ (Eccl. 1:17). We want to live with a good purpose; to do what's worth doing.

We thirst for assurance that we are forgiven so that we can quit lying to ourselves and become heralds of forgiveness to others.

We are famished for community and for conviction that God's promises remain firm even when we are in doubt.

Further, these marvelous gifts do not come at our initiative. “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (v. 37). We come to Christ because the Father “gives us” to do so. 1 John 4:19 reads: “We love because he first loved us.” Our experience of faith begins with a choice made by the Father, and it cannot fail because Jesus holds onto us now and will raise us up on the last day (v. 39).

This teaching flies in the face of the wisdom of the secular world. We do not exist as the result of impersonal material processes. Jesus' words confer infinite worth upon us. “I am the bread of life. The one who comes to me will never hunger and never thirst.”

And this fountain of life flows forever. “Everyone who looks on the son and believes in him should have eternal life.” Consideration of eternity is also a challenge to contemporary secular thinking which glories in transitory experiences and *wonders* that last only for a moment. Those who come to and believe in Christ will have eternal life.

As fallen creatures we expect to decline over time. Age robs us of vitality and for those who die in old age life ends at the moment of greatest deterioration and loss. But

for followers of Jesus the end of this life is not the end. The ‘last day’ is resurrection day when we enter a glorious new reality.

But, despite the beauty of these promises some do not believe (v. 36) and they object to what Jesus has said:

John 6:41-46:

So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.”⁴²They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’”⁴³Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves.⁴⁴No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.⁴⁵It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—⁴⁶not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father.

We might make two observations about unbelief from reading these verses. First, we encounter the argument that what is unfamiliar is impossible. Because his questioners knew something about Jesus’ childhood, they could not believe the claim that he “came down from heaven.” For them, facts of his humanity nullified his claim to be one with the Father.

Most secular criticisms of the Christian faith today make the same argument. But Jesus’ unique reality is not rendered false because *we have never seen such a thing before*. The incarnation only occurred one time and cannot be explained nor invalidated by relying on what we already know. Remember this word from this book’s prologue: John 1:17, “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

Second, faith in God depends on the call of God. No one comes “unless the Father who sent me draws him.” Jesus’ claims ring true in the hearing of those who listen to the Father’s voice—who trust and obey what they already know about the ways of God. “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.”

Faith is a choice and a gift. Consider this case: we pray for a friend to be healed and her surgery is successful. A skeptic will credit modern medicine alone, while a believer will take note of God at work in the skill of the doctor.

Tanya Luhrman is a Stanford professor of anthropology who studied (and befriended) a church community in Silicon Valley for two years. She wrote the following about observing people who prayed:

I found that after a month of prayer practice, people reported more vivid mental imagery than those who listened to the lectures,” she says. “They used mental imagery more readily and had somewhat better perceptual attention, and they reported more unusual sensory experience. In short, they attended to their inner experience more seriously, and that altered how real that experience became for them.

Those who prayed were grateful for the unseen presence of God’s Spirit and the secular scientist determined that they “attended to their inner experience more seriously.” What we conclude about Jesus has everything to do with what the condition of our hearts are when we consider his words. A verse from the following chapter speaks to this point as well, John 7:17 “If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.”

These remaining verses emphatically restate themes we have already considered.

John 6:47-51:

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.⁴⁸I am the bread of life.⁴⁹Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.⁵⁰This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

In v. 51 Jesus moves beyond the memory of manna in the wilderness and looks forward to his death. His death is the heart of the matter. The gift of the bread of life means we need never hunger or thirst, but it comes at great cost.